P. G. Wodehouse (1881-1975)

Sir P. G. Wodehouse KBE

Wodehouse in 1904 (aged 23).
Born Pelham Grenville Wodehouse
15 October 1881
Guildford, Surrey, England, UK
Died 14 February 1975 (aged 93)
Southampton, New York, U.S.
Pen name Henry William-Jones
P Brooke-Haven
Pelham Grenville
Melrose Grainger
J Walker Williams
C P West
Occupation novelist, playwright and lyricist
Nationality British
United States (naturalized in 1955, aged 74)
Period 1902–75
Genres comedy, romantic comedy
Signature

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, KBE (play /ˈwʊd.haʊs/; 15 October 1881 – 14 February 1975) was an English humorist, whose body of work includes novels, short stories, plays, poems, song lyrics, and numerous pieces of journalism. He enjoyed enormous popular success during a career that lasted more than seventy years and his many writings continue to be widely read. Despite the political and social upheavals that occurred during his life, much of which was spent in France and the United States, Wodehouse's main canvas remained that of pre-1914 English upper-class society, reflecting his birth, education, and youthful writing career.

An acknowledged master of English prose, Wodehouse has been admired both by contemporaries such as Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh and Rudyard Kipling and by modern writers such as Stephen Fry,[1] Douglas Adams,[2] Zadie Smith,[citation needed] J. K. Rowling,[3] and John Le Carré [4].

Best known today for the Jeeves and Blandings Castle novels and short stories, Wodehouse was also a playwright and lyricist who was part author and writer of 15 plays and of 250 lyrics for some 30 musical comedies, many of them produced in collaboration with Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton. He worked with Cole Porter on the musical Anything Goes (1934), wrote the lyrics for the hit song "Bill" in Kern's Show Boat (1927), wrote lyrics to Sigmund Romberg's music for the Gershwin – Romberg musical Rosalie (1928), and collaborated with Rudolf Friml on a musical version of The Three Musketeers (1928). He is in the Songwriters Hall of Fame.[5]
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Early life

Wodehouse, called "Plum"[6] by most family and friends, was born prematurely to Eleanor Wodehouse (née Deane; daughter of John Bathurst Deane) while she was visiting Guildford. He was baptized at St. Nicolas' Church, Guildford.[7] His aunt Mary Deane was the author of the novel Mr.

Zinzan of Bath; or, Seen in an Old Mirror.[8] His father, Henry Ernest Wodehouse[9] (1845–1929), was a British judge in Hong Kong. The Wodehouse family had been settled in Norfolk for many centuries. Wodehouse's great-grandfather Reverend Philip Wodehouse was the second son of Sir Armine Wodehouse, 5th Baronet, whose eldest son John Wodehouse, 1st Baron Wodehouse, was the ancestor of the Earls of Kimberley. His godfather was Pelham von Donop, after whom he was named.[10]

When he was just three years old, Wodehouse was brought back to England and placed in the care of a nanny. He attended various boarding schools and, between the ages of three and 15 years, saw his parents for barely six months in total.[11] Wodehouse grew very close to his brother, who shared his love for art. Wodehouse filled the voids in his life by writing relentlessly. He spent quite a few of his school holidays with one aunt or another; it has been speculated that this gave him a healthy horror of the "gaggle of aunts", reflected in Bertie Wooster's formidable aunts Agatha and Dahlia, as well as Lady Constance Keeble's tyranny over her many nieces and nephews in the Blandings Castle series.

Wodehouse's first school was The Chalet School, Croydon (now Elmhurst School for Boys), which he attended between 1886 and 1889, together with his two older brothers. (Richard, the youngest of the four Wodehouse brothers, was much younger and became somewhat noteworthy as a cricketer in Asia.) In 1889, the oldest brother, Peveril, was diagnosed as having a weak chest, and the three brothers were sent to Elizabeth College, Guernsey, where Peveril could benefit from the sea air. Wodehouse remained at Elizabeth College for two years, until, at age 10, it became time for him to move to a preparatory school. Wodehouse's first prep school was Malvern House, at Kearsney, near Dover, which specialised in preparing boys for entry to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. Wodehouse spent two unhappy years at Malvern House before finally persuading his father to send him to Dulwich College, where his elder brother Armine was already a student.

He enjoyed attending Dulwich College, where he was successful both as a student and as a sportsman: he was a member of the Classics VIth Form (traditionally, the preserve of the brightest students) and a School prefect, he edited the college magazine, The Alleynian, sang and acted leading roles in musical and theatrical productions, and gained his school colours as a member of the cricket First XI and rugby football First XV; he also represented the school at boxing (until barred by poor eyesight) and his house at athletics. The library at Dulwich is now named after him.

Wodehouse's elder brother, Armine, had won a classics scholarship to Oxford University (where he gained a first class degree) and Pelham was widely expected to follow in his brother's footsteps, but a fall in the value of the Indian rupee (in which currency his father's pension was expressed) forced him to abandon such plans. His father found him a position with the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (now known as HSBC), where, after two years' training in London, he would have been posted to an overseas branch. However, Wodehouse was never interested in banking as a career and "never learned a thing about banking". (Some of his experiences in the bank were recounted in Psmith in the City.) He wrote part-time while working in the bank, and in 1902 became a journalist with The Globe

(a now defunct newspaper), taking over the comic column from a friend who had resigned. Thereafter, Wodehouse contributed items to Punch,[12] Vanity Fair (1903–1906), Daily Express (1904) and The World: A Journal for Men and Women (1906/1907). He also wrote stories for schoolboy's magazines (The Captain and Public School Magazine) that were compiled to form his first published novels and four playlets with his friend Bertram Fletcher Robinson.[13]

In 1907, Wodehouse contributed the lyrics to two songs to the Seymour Hicks musical comedy The Gay Gordons. One of the other lyricists on the show was his fellow Globe newspaperman C. H. Bovill. The two would later collaborate on the 1914 revue Nuts and Wine and a series of six short stories collected as A Man of Means in 1913-14.[14]

During 1909, Wodehouse stayed in Greenwich Village and "sold two short stories to Cosmopolitan and Collier's for a total of $500 – much more than I had ever earned before." He then resigned from The Globe and stayed in New York, where he became a regular contributor (under a variety of pseudonyms) to the newly-founded American Vanity Fair (1913). However "the wolf was always at the door", and it was not until The Saturday Evening Post serialised Something New in 1915 that he had his "first break". Around this time he began collaborating with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern on (eventually eighteen) musical comedies, including the innovative Princess Theatre musicals.[15]

In 1914, Wodehouse married Ethel Wayman and gained a stepdaughter called Leonora. He had no biological children, and it is possible that he was rendered sterile after contracting mumps as an adolescent.[16]

During the 1930s, he had two brief stints as a screenwriter in Hollywood, where he controversially claimed he was greatly overpaid. Many of his novels were also serialised in magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post and The Strand, which also paid well.

Life beyond Britain

Although Wodehouse and his novels are considered quintessentially English, from 1914 onward he split his time between England and the United States. In 1934, he took up residence in France, to avoid double taxation on his earnings by the tax authorities in Britain and the U.S. He was also profoundly uninterested in politics and world affairs. When World War II broke out in 1939 he remained at his seaside home in Le Touquet, France, instead of returning to England, apparently failing to recognise the seriousness of the conflict. It is also said that his wife couldn't bear to leave their dog, Wonder.[17] Subsequently the German military authorities in occupied France interned him (along with several other Englishmen in the same position) as an "enemy alien" according to the Geneva Convention. He was interned first in Belgium, then at Tost in Upper Silesia (now Toszek in Poland), of which he is recorded having said, "If this is Upper Silesia, one wonders what Lower Silesia must be like…"[18]

While at Tost, he entertained his fellow prisoners with witty dialogues. He was released from internment a few months before his 60th birthday when, under the Geneva Convention, he should have been released anyway; the early release led to allegations that he had made a deal with the Nazi

authorities. He then drafted several humorous talks, based on his life at Tost, as the basis for a series of radio broadcasts aimed at America, which was not then at war with Germany. After his release from internment, he lived for a time at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin, before moving to Paris, which was still under German occupation. When the text of his commentaries was published in the UK many years later, several short sentences were suppressed (probably by Wodehouse himself) which showed him being relatively friendly to the German military when they arrived at Le Touquet.

In 1941 he made a series of broadcasts which enraged public opinion in Britain. In one, he said: "I'm quite unable to work up any kind of belligerent feeling. "Just as I'm about to feel belligerent about some country, I meet a decent sort of chap.

"We go out together and lose any fighting thoughts." He spoke lightly of internment as being useful "for keeping you out of the saloon". Wodehouse also made a remark to an American correspondent in Berlin (the United States had not entered the war at that stage) about "whether Britain wins the war or not". \

Wodehouse believed he would be admired as showing himself to have "kept a stiff upper lip" during his internment,[19] but he misjudged the mood in wartime England, where the broadcasts led to many accusations of collaborationism with the Germans and even treason. Some libraries banned his books. Foremost among his critics was A. A. Milne, author of the Winnie the Pooh books; Wodehouse took revenge in a short story parody, Rodney Has a Relapse (1949), in which a character based on Milne writes about his son, a ridiculous character named "Timothy Bobbin".[20][21] Another critic was the playwright Sean O'Casey who, in a letter to The Daily Telegraph in July 1941, wrote: "If England has any dignity left in the way of literature, she will forget for ever the pitiful antics of English literature's performing flea". Wodehouse deflected the insult by giving the title Performing Flea to a collection of his letters to a friend, Bill Townend. Among Wodehouse's defenders were Evelyn Waugh and George Orwell.[22] An investigation by the British security service MI5 concluded that Wodehouse was naïve and foolish but not a traitor.[23] Documents declassified in the 1980s revealed that while he was living in Paris, his living expenses were paid by the Nazis,[24] but papers released by the British Public Record Office in 1999 showed that this had been accounted for by MI5 investigators when establishing Wodehouse's innocence;[19] the money was, in fact, Wodehouse's legitimate earnings, including an advance from his Spanish publisher, but had to be channelled via the German Central Bank.[25]

The criticism led Wodehouse and his wife to move permanently to New York. Apart from his stepdaughter Leonora, who died during Wodehouse's internment in Germany, they had no children. He became a United States citizen in 1955, spending the remainder of his life in Remsenburg, New York, never to visit his homeland again.

Later life

Wodehouse continued to write novels and to follow an exercise regime into his nineties. He was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) in the 1975 New Year Honours;[26] it is widely believed that the honour was not given earlier because of lingering resentment about the German broadcasts. His doctor advised him not to

travel to London for the investiture and his wife later accepted the knighthood on his behalf from the British consul.[27] Toward the end of January 1975, he developed pemphigus, a persistent skin rash, brought on by the strain of extra work, answering fan mail and recording the introductions to the Wodehouse Playhouse TV series. In early February, he entered Southampton Hospital, where he died of a heart attack on 14 February 1975 at age 93.[28] His last novel, Sunset at Blandings, was unfinished at his death and was published posthumously in 1977.

In a BBC interview shortly before his death, Wodehouse said that he had no ambitions left as he had been knighted and created as a wax figure at Madame Tussaud's.

In 1996 The writer and bandleader Graham Dalby wrote and presented 'What Ho! Wodehouse' for the BBC Radio 2 Arts Programme with the aid of the author of 'Wodehouse at War' (then Heritage Secretary Iain Sproat MP) set out to prove successfully for the first time on air that Wodehouse had no case to answer on suspicion of Collaboration and Treason. It was Iain Sproat who failed to secure Wodehouse's Knighthood under the Edward Heath government but succeeded with Harold Wilson's Labour Government but, as he said, "for all the wrong reasons" and Wodehouse's name was not cleared until afer his death.

The Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize, given annually for the finest example of comic writing in the UK, was established and named in his honour in 2000.

Writing style

Wodehouse took a modest attitude to his own works. In Over Seventy (1957) he wrote: "I go in for what is known in the trade as 'light writing' and those who do that – humorists they are sometimes called – are looked down upon by the intelligentsia and sneered at."

However, he also lightly taunted his critics, as in the introduction to Summer Lightning.[29]

> "A certain critic—for such men, I regret to say, do exist—made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained 'all the old Wodehouse characters under different names'. He has probably by now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha; but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against Summer Lightning. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. Pretty silly it will make him feel, I rather fancy."

His writing style is notable for its unique blend of contemporary London clubroom slang with elegant, classically-informed drawing-room English; for example:[30]

> "I once got engaged to his daughter Honoria, a ghastly dynamic exhibit who read Nietzsche and had a laugh like waves breaking on a stern and rockbound coast."[31]

Literary tastes and influence

In the above-mentioned article, Wodehouse names some contemporary humorists whom he held in high regard. These include Frank Sullivan, A. P. Herbert, W. S. Gilbert[32] and Alex Atkinson. Two essays in Tales of St. Austin's satirise modern literary criticism: "The Tom Brown Question" is a parody of Homeric analysts, and "Notes" criticises both classical and English critics, with an ironic exception for those explicating the meaning of Browning. In "Work", Wodehouse calls the claim that "Virgil is hard" "a shallow falsehood", but notes that "Aeschylus, on the other hand, is a demon". Shakespeare and Tennyson were also obvious influences; their works were the only books Wodehouse took with him in his internment.[33] He frequently quoted Kipling and Omar Khayyam. Wodehouse enjoyed the traditional English thriller: one of his characters declares that "It is impossible not to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace",[34] and he dedicated Sam the Sudden to Wallace, while Agatha Christie dedicated her Hallowe'en Party "To P G Wodehouse — whose books and stories have brightened my life for many years. Also, to show my pleasure in his having been kind enough to tell me he enjoyed my books." In the 1960s he gave important praise for the debut novels of Donald Jack, Gavin Lyall[35] and George MacDonald Fraser.[36] In later life, he read mysteries by Ngaio Marsh and Rex Stout, and unfailingly watched the soap opera The Edge of Night.[37]

Characters

Wodehouse's characters, however, were not always popular with the establishment, notably the foppish foolishness of Bertie Wooster. Papers released by the Public Record Office have disclosed that when Wodehouse was recommended in 1967 for the Order of the Companions of Honour, Sir Patrick Dean, the British ambassador in Washington, argued that it "would also give currency to a Bertie Wooster image of the British character which we are doing our best to eradicate."[38]

Wodehouse's characters are often eccentric, with peculiar attachments, such as to pigs (Lord Emsworth), newts (Gussie Fink-Nottle), antique silver (Bertie's Uncle Tom Travers), golf-collectables (numerous characters) or socks (Archibald Mulliner). His "mentally negligible" good-natured characters invariably make their lot worse by their half-witted schemes to improve a bad situation. In many cases the classic eccentricities of Wodehouse's upper class give rise to plot complications. The very first Jeeves story ("Jeeves Takes Charge") concerns an attempt to prevent publication of an old man's memoirs, which contain embarrassing stories about aristocrats and other prestigious persons in their youth.[39]

Relatives, especially aunts and uncles, are commonly depicted with an exaggerated power to help or impede marriage or financial prospects, or simply to make life miserable. (Bertie speaks of "Aunt Agatha getting after [someone] with her hatchet".) Several of the Jeeves stories involve helping a pal deceive a wealthy relative on whom the pal depends financially ("The Aunt and the Sluggard", "Comrade Bingo"). When Bertie Wooster is first introduced ("Jeeves Takes Charge"), he is himself dependent upon his Uncle Willoughby, and only when this uncle hands in his dinner pail (dies) does Bertram become independently wealthy.

Children of both genders are invariably troublesome and annoying, and frequently malicious. The most egregious is Edwin the Boy Scout, whose attempts at "acts of kindness" cause disasters of widely varying severity in several Jeeves novels and short stories. Other examples of simple 'misguided youth' occur in the 1936 novel 'Laughing Gas',where the child Hollywood star Joey Cooley is viewed in (at times) a very sympathetic light, and in 'Service with a Smile',where the boy George Threepwood (Grandson to the Earl of Emsworth) is viewed as mischievous, rather than villainous.

Friends are often more a trouble than a comfort in Wodehouse stories: Bertie Wooster in particular is often obliged to put himself to trouble, and sometimes to endure considerable suffering, in order to help a friend. (The Code of the Woosters, in the novel of the same name, is "Never let a pal down.") Antagonists (particularly rivals in love) are frequently terrifying and just as often get their comeuppance in a gratifying fashion.

Policemen and magistrates are typically portrayed as threatening, yet easy to fool, often through the simple expedient of giving a false name. A recurring motif is the theft of policemen's helmets. One of the most dislikable characters in the entire opus is a magistrate, Sir Watkyn Bassett.

In a manner going back to the stock characters of Roman comedy (such as Plautus), Wodehouse's servants are frequently far cleverer than their masters. This is quintessentially true with Jeeves, who always pulls Bertie Wooster out of the direst scrapes by means of cunning and resource, often by deceptively manipulating him (e.g. "Bertie Changes his Mind", Right Ho, Jeeves) or by convincing him to sacrifice himself. It recurs elsewhere, such as with the efficient (though despised) Baxter, secretary to the befogged Lord Emsworth.

Another recurring type is the successful, square-jawed, ruthless American business executive, most notably in Thank You, Jeeves and in the golf story "The Heel of Achilles" but also in later stories about the Mulliners in Hollywood.

Big bruisers who come and go unexpectedly, muttering threats, abound in Wodehouse, including first and foremost Roderick Spode and Tuppy Glossop but also any number of bookies' henchmen, jealous lovers, nosy neighbours, burglars, and what would now be called animal-rights activists.

Many stories involve a strong-willed, independent, middle-aged (or older) female troublemaker. Examples include Bertie Wooster's Aunt Agatha; Lord Emsworth's many sisters, notably Lady Constance Keeble; Headmistress Mapleton in "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina"; Lady Bassett in the Mulliner short story "Strychnine in the Soup"; and the poisonous Princess von und zu Dworniczek in Summer Moonshine. Even Aunt Dahlia, the exceptional aunt who is a "good egg", makes plenty of troublesome demands on Bertie. Most abhorrent are the female writers, young and old, such as Ukridge's Aunt Julia, Bertie Wooster's cousin (and sometime fiancée) Florence Craye, and, when the evil fit is upon her, Bingo Little's wife Rosie M. Banks.

Animals of many types play major roles in his works, and are the unifying force in A Wodehouse Bestiary, published by Dorset Press in 1985, Foreword by Howard Phipps, Jr., President, New York Zoological Society. Perhaps most famous and beloved of all Wodehouse's non-human characters is Lord Emsworth's Empress of Blandings, who is also the subject of one of his most popular, as well as his hardest-to-spell, stories, "Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey!". Wodehouse lived with a dog on his lap at most times, and usually lived with several Pekes. Dogs, often referred to as "dumb chums", especially Pekingese, feature prominently in short stories and novels. Wodehouse often referred to their screams and love of food, in their person and in his use of similes. He also often referred to snails and slugs, though he was wont to treat them rather generically, as Phipps criticised in his Foreword when he said, "Unfortunately he is sometimes unspecific, referring only to a 'snake' or a 'parrot', and is frequently guilty of adopting a stereotyped view of snakes, parrots, rabbits and rats."

Plots

Wodehouse was known for his consummate skill at their detailed construction and development. This did not come immediately to him; in the early Psmith novels Psmith in the City and Psmith, Journalist, the device by which the author rescues the protagonists from their mounting difficulties is a simple infusion of cash from Psmith's father. This would soon change, and by the 1920s his novels were already showing off his genius for creating multiple layers of comedic complications that the characters must endure to reach the invariable happy ending. Typically, a relative or friend makes some demand that forces a character into a bizarre situation from which it seems impossible to recover, only to resolve itself in a clever and satisfying finale. The layers pile up thickly in the longer works, with a character getting into multiple dangerous situations by mid-story. An outstanding example of this is The Code of the Woosters where most of the chapters have an essential plot point reversed in the last sentence, catapulting the characters forward into greater diplomatic disasters. A key figure in most Wodehouse stories is a "fixer" whose genius soars above the incompetent blather and crude bluster of most of the other characters, Jeeves being the best known example. Other characters in this vein are Lord Ickenham ("Uncle Fred") and Galahad Threepwood, who perform much the same role in the Blandings Castle stories—though never both at the same time—and Psmith, who does the same thing in the stories that bear his name.[citation needed]

Engagements are a common theme in Wodehouse stories. A man may be unable to become engaged to the woman he loves due to some impediment such as poverty, feelings of inferiority, or a relative's objection. Just as often, a protagonist unwillingly or unwittingly gets engaged to a woman he does not love, and must find some back-door way out other than breaking it off directly (which goes against a gentleman's code of honour and renders him vulnerable to a lawsuit for breach of promise). The most widely-read case in point is Bertie Wooster's engagement to the objectionable Madeline Bassett in Right Ho, Jeeves, which recurs in several subsequent novels.

Impersonations, and resulting confusion, are particularly common in the Blandings books, but also occur in other works. Often the impersonation is discovered, but the impersonator is able to silence the discoverer by

means of bribery or blackmail, as in Leave it to Psmith and Uncle Fred in the Springtime.

Gambling often plays a large role in Wodehouse plots, typically with someone manipulating the outcome of the wager.

Another subject which features strongly in Wodehouse's plots is alcohol, and many plots revolve around the tipsiness of a major character. In The Mating Season, he enumerated what many people consider as the definitive list of hangovers: the Broken Compass, the Sewing Machine, the Comet, the Atomic, the Cement Mixer and the Gremlin Boogie. Furthermore, he makes several references to a drink called the "May Queen",[40] described by Uncle Fred as "any good dry champagne, to which is added brandy, armagnac, kümmel, yellow chartreuse, and old stout, to taste", which inspires several characters to acts of daring, such as proposing to their true loves. Sometimes, other psychoactive substances are featured, for instance in Laughing Gas and the short story "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo".

Writings

Main articles: List of books by P. G. Wodehouse and List of short stories by P. G. Wodehouse

Wodehouse was a prolific author, writing 96 books in his remarkable seventy-three year long career (1902 to 1975). His works include novels, collections of short stories, and musical comedies. Many characters and locations appear repeatedly throughout his short stories and novels, leading readers to classify his work by "series":

The Blandings Castle stories (later dubbed "the Blandings Castle Saga" by Wodehouse[41]), about the upper-class inhabitants of the fictional rural Blandings Castle. Includes the eccentric Lord Emsworth, obsessed by his prize-winning pig, the "Empress of Blandings", and at one point by his equally prize-winning pumpkin ("Hope of Blandings", but, mockingly, "Percy" to Emsworth's unappreciative second son Freddie Threepwood).

The Drones Club stories, about the mishaps of certain members of a raucous social club for London's idle rich. Drones Club stories always involve unnamed club members known as "Eggs", "Beans" and "Crumpets" (after the habit of addressing each other as "old egg", "old bean" or "old crumpet"); in each story, a well-informed Crumpet will endeavour to tell an Egg or Bean of the latest exploits of another Drones Club member, most frequently Freddie Widgeon or Bingo Little. Also featured are a cast of recurrent bit players such as Club millionaire Oofy Prosser.

The Golf and Oldest Member stories. They are built around one of Wodehouse's passions, the sport of golf, which all characters involved consider the only important pursuit in life. The Oldest Member of the golf course clubhouse tells most of them, usually to unwilling listeners who would prefer to be elsewhere.

The Jeeves and Wooster stories, narrated by the wealthy, scatterbrained Bertie Wooster. A number of stories and novels that recount the improbable and unfortunate situations in which he and his friends find themselves and the manner in which his ingenious valet Jeeves is always able to extricate them. Collectively called "the Jeeves stories", or "Jeeves and Wooster", they are Wodehouse's most famous. The Jeeves stories are a valuable compendium of pre-World War II English slang in use. One of

the Jeeves and Wooster stories, "Bertie Changes His Mind" (originally published in 1922) is narrated by Jeeves instead of by Bertie.

The Mr Mulliner stories, narrated by a genial pub raconteur who can take any topic of conversation and turn it into an involved, implausible story about a member of his family. Most of Mr. Mulliner's stories involve one or another of his innumerable nephews. His listeners are always identified solely by their drinks, e.g., a "Hot Scotch and Lemon" or a "Double Whisky and Splash".

The School stories, which launched Wodehouse's career with their comparative realism. They are often located at the fictional public schools of St. Austin's or Wrykyn.

The Psmith stories, about an ingenious jack-of-all-trades with a charming, exaggeratedly refined manner. The final Psmith story, Leave it to Psmith, overlaps the Blandings stories in that Psmith works for Lord Emsworth, lives for a time at Blandings Castle, and becomes a friend of Freddie Threepwood. Psmith first appeared in the school novel Mike.

The Ukridge stories, about the charming but unprincipled Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, always looking to enlarge his income through the reluctant assistance of his friend in his schemes. Besides the short stories, there is one novel about him: Love Among the Chickens.

The Uncle Fred stories, about the eccentric Earl of Ickenham. Whenever he can escape his wife's chaperonage, he likes to spread what he calls "sweetness and light" and others are likely to call chaos. His escapades, always involving impersonations of some sort, are usually told from the viewpoint of his nephew and reluctant companion Reginald "Pongo" Twistleton. Several times he performs his "art" at Blandings Castle.

The stand-alone stories. Stories which are not part of a series (although they may contain overlapping minor characters), such as Piccadilly Jim, Quick Service, Summer Moonshine, Sam the Sudden, and Laughing Gas.

Almost all of these series overlap: Psmith appears in a "School" story and a Blandings novel; Bertie Wooster is a member of the Drones Club; Uncle Fred and Pongo Twistleton appear in both the Blandings Saga and the Drones club stories; Bingo Little is a regular character in the Jeeves Stories and the Drones Club stories, etc.

Adaptations

Considering the extent of his success, there have been comparatively few adaptations of Wodehouse's works. He was reluctant to allow others to adapt the Jeeves stories:

> One great advantage in being a historian to a man like Jeeves is that his mere personality prevents one selling one's artistic soul for gold. In recent years I have had lucrative offers for his services from theatrical managers, motion-picture magnates, the proprietors of one or two widely advertised commodities, and even the editor of the comic supplement of an American newspaper, who wanted him for a "comic strip". But, tempting though the terms were, it only needed Jeeves' deprecating cough and his murmured "I would scarcely advocate it, sir," to put the jack under my better nature. Jeeves knows his place, and it is between the covers of a book." (from Wodehouse's introduction to the compilation The World of Jeeves, 1967)

Doing his own adaptations for film did not attract him either. He had been retained by MGM in 1930 but little used: "They paid me $2,000 a week.... Yet apparently they had the greatest difficulty in finding anything for me to do."[42] He returned to MGM in 1937 to work on the screenplay of Rosalie, but even though he was now being paid $2,500 a week and living luxuriously in Hollywood, he said "I'm not enjoying life much just now. I don't like doing pictures."[43]

However, he formed a warm working relationship with Ian Hay, who adapted A Damsel in Distress as a stage play in 1928, with Hay, Wodehouse and A. A. Milne all investing in the production.[44] Wodehouse and Hay holidayed together in Scotland, finding "a lot of interests in common". Wodehouse went on to help dramatise Hay's story Baa Baa Black Sheep in 1929, and in 1930 they co-wrote the stage version of Leave It to Psmith.[45]

Wodehouse wrote the screenplay for the musical film A Damsel in Distress released in 1937, starring Fred Astaire, George Burns, Gracie Allen, and Joan Fontaine, with music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin. A 1962 film adaptation of The Girl On The Boat starred Norman Wisdom, Millicent Martin and Richard Briers.

The Blandings, Jeeves, Ukridge and Mulliner stories have all been adapted for television. The Jeeves series has been adapted for television twice, once in the 1960s (by the BBC), with the title The World of Wooster, starring Ian Carmichael as Bertie Wooster, and Dennis Price as Jeeves, and again in the 1990s (by Granada Television for ITV), with the title Jeeves and Wooster, starring Hugh Laurie as Bertie and Stephen Fry as Jeeves. David Niven and Arthur Treacher also starred as Bertie and Jeeves, respectively, in a short 1930s film that had the title Thank You, Jeeves!, though neither this nor the sequel, Step Lively, Jeeves, also starring Treacher as Jeeves but without Bertie, bears any relation to a Wodehouse story.

In 1975, Andrew Lloyd Webber made a musical, originally titled Jeeves. In 1996, it was rewritten as the more successful By Jeeves, which made it to Broadway, and a performance recorded as a video film, also shown on TV.

A version of Heavy Weather was filmed by the BBC in 1995 starring Peter O'Toole as Lord Emsworth and Richard Briers, again, as Lord Emsworth's brother, Galahad Threepwood.

Piccadilly Jim was first filmed in 1919, and again in 1936, starring Robert Montgomery. In 2004, Julian Fellowes wrote another screen adaptation which starred Sam Rockwell, but this version was unsuccessful.

There was also a series of BBC adaptations of various short works, mostly from the Mulliner series, under the title of Wodehouse Playhouse starring John Alderton and Pauline Collins, which aired starting in 1975. The first series was introduced by Wodehouse himself in the last year of his life.

Wodehouse's involvement with film and television from around the world is chronicled in Brian Taves, P.G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptations (McFarland, 2006).

Czech author Zdeněk Jirotka based his Saturnin novel largely on the character of Jeeves.[citation needed]

The FX animated series Archer has a butler character named Woodhouse, as a tribute to the author.

Although not an adaptation, author Jonathan Ames wrote the novel "Wake Up, Sir" about a man who acquires his very own butler, also named Jeeves. There are many passages and references to P.G. Wodehouse throughout the novel.

Major characters
Lists of P. G. Wodehouse characters
Characters in all Wodehouse stories
Characters in the Blandings stories
Characters in the Drones Club stories
Characters in the Jeeves stories
Characters in the Mulliner stories
Characters in the Ukridge stories
Characters in other stories

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Major characters of primary importance

Wodehouse's work contains a number of recurring protagonists, narrators and principal characters, including:

- Bertie Wooster and his valet Jeeves; his Aunt Dahlia and his Aunt Agatha
- Lord Emsworth of Blandings Castle, and his large family
- Mr Mulliner, irrepressible pub raconteur of family stories
- The Oldest Member, irrepressible nineteenth hole raconteur of golf stories
- Psmith, monocled dandy and practical socialist
- Ukridge, irrepressible entrepreneur and cheerful opportunist
- Uncle Fred (Frederick Cornwallis, Fifth Earl of Ickenham), considered, in some circles, a disgrace to the Peerage. Spreading "sweetness and light" through impersonation

Major characters of secondary importance

Certain of Wodehouse's less central characters are particularly well-known, despite being less critical elements of his works as a whole.

- Anatole, French chef extraordinaire, very temperamental
- Galahad Threepwood, Lord Emsworth's brother, lifelong bachelor with a mis-spent youth and a kind heart
- Sebastian Beach, Lord Emsworth's butler
- Rupert Baxter, Lord Emsworth's efficient but annoying secretary
- Major Brabazon-Plank, Amazon explorer, afraid of bonnie babies
- Sir Roderick Glossop, intimidating psychiatrist

Honoria Glossop, Sir Roderick's daughter and sometime fiancée of Bertie Wooster, demanding, imperious, athletic

Tuppy Glossop, Sir Roderick's nephew, muscular rugby-player

Roderick Spode, later 7th Earl of Sidcup, amateur dictator, very tall and muscular, based on British fascist Oswald Mosley

Pongo Twistleton, Uncle Fred's nephew

Oofy Prosser, millionaire member of the Drones Club

Monty Bodkin, second richest member of the Drones Club (second to Oofy Prosser)

Bingo Little, friend of Bertie Wooster, with a complicated love-life

Sidney McMurdo, big, muscular golfer, inclined to jealousy

Agnes Flack, big, muscular, female golfer

Freddie Widgeon, member of the Drones Club

Gussie Fink-Nottle, fish-faced, socially awkward newt-fancier who cannot hold his liquor

Sir Watkyn Bassett, owner of Totleigh Towers

Madeline Bassett, daughter of Sir Watkyn, very pretty but disturbingly drippy and poetical; often voices conviction that "the stars are God's daisy-chain" and other goofy sentiments

Bobbie Wickham, attractive but ruthless red-haired girl, very demanding and fond of practical jokes

Florence Craye, Bertie Wooster's cousin and sometimes fiancee, and author of the novel Spindrift

Lord Uffenham, owner and butler of Shipley Hall

Mike Jackson, Psmith's steadfast, cricket-playing friend

Archibald Mulliner, sock collector who can mimic a hen laying an egg

Extremely minor, but ubiquitous, character

Lord Knubble of Knopp, mentioned in Mulliner stories and Golf Stories and other stories as well; references to him are always so brief and inconsequential that they may not be fully catalogued. Most often mentioned in connection with other characters, without actually appearing. A thin, well-dressed, "horse-faced" man, who occasionally appears at house parties and loses at cards. Very wealthy in spite of this.

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^ Higham, Charles (1985), American Swastika. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. ISBN 978-0-385-17874-7
^ McCrum, p 342
^ London Gazette: (Supplement) no. 46444. p. 8. 31 December 1974.
^ McCrum (2004), p. 414
^ McCrum (2004), p. 414-5
^ Arrow Books 2008 edition
^ Stephen Fry's essay on Wodehouse
^ P. G. Wodehouse, "Jeeves and the Yule-tide Spirit" in Very Good, Jeeves, 1930
^ PG Wodehouse(1881–1975). Guardian.co.uk, retrieved on 21 May 2007
^ McCrum (2004), p. 276.
^ Very Good, Jeeves!, "The Spot of Art"
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Wikisource has original works written by or about: P. G. Wodehouse

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Wodehouse societies

P G Wodehouse Society.org.uk – The P G Wodehouse Society (UK): events, Tony Ring's Information Sheets, quiz

Wodehouse.org – TWS, The Wodehouse Society (North America): events, links to essays

Other Wodehouse Societies (Australia, Belgium, Finland, India, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Sweden)

Wodehouse info

A Celebration of P G Wodehouse – Annotated bibliography, characters index, text annotations

Biblia Wodehousiana - Inventory of biblical quotations and allusions

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About Wodehouse

1958 BBC interview

"In Defence of P. G. Wodehouse" by George Orwell, 1945 – Defending PGW accused of treason

"What ho! My hero, PG Wodehouse" by Stephen Fry (Jeeves actor), The Independent, 18 January 2000 – Recollections and appreciation

Wodehouse Saved my Life by Hugh Laurie, The Daily Telegraph 27 May 99

"P. G. Wodehouse interview" by Gerald Clarke, The Paris Review, Winter 1975 (PDF format, 386 kB)

PGW's ancestry – parents Henry Ernest Wodehouse and Eleanor Deane, links to ancestors (no PGW as of 2007)

P. G. Wodehouse at Find a Grave – grave location and photography

Online works in the public domain in the United States

Works by P. G. Wodehouse at Project Gutenberg – about 40 books in English as of 2007

Transcripts of the five controversial Berlin broadcasts

Other links

Works by or about P. G. Wodehouse in libraries (WorldCat catalog)

Wodehouse-related discussion groups (book of the month, TV series, etc.) at Yahoo! Groups – Blandings (420+ members), WodehouseIndia (220+ members), TheDrones (140+ members), etc. as of 2007

Filming a Comedy Master's Life in Wantagh (BBC films segments of a TV special on the life of P.G. Wodehouse)

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HIS PRIVATE LIFE
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PG Wodehouse, the author of the Jeeves and Castle Blandings stories was one of the greatest English comic writers of the last century. Thirty years after his death over 100 of his books remain in print, for the simple reason that they are tremendously funny.

However, his work is also extraordinary to modern readers for its lack of any smutty jokes. Although most of his plots centre on romantic entanglements, there are no direct references to sex.

His personal life seems to have been similarly arid in that direction. His autobiography and correspondence make almost no mention of sex[1]. This is not just Victorian reticence - Wodehouse appears also to have been almost completely asexual. Nevertheless his life has some interest for those interested in the range of human sexual behaviour.

He does not appear to have been homosexual, although he had opportunities. He lived half his life in New York, presumably a good place to meet gays then as now. Working in the theatre world he was friendly with many openly gay men such as his collaborator, the bisexual Cole Porter. In the 1920s he frequently stayed at Hunstanton Hall in Norfolk as the guest of the flamboyantly homosexual Charles le Strange, a distant cousin. (Some aspects of the fictional Blandings Castle are based on features of

Hunstanton Hall.) In 1936, on his second long visit to Hollywood, he stayed in the house of Gaylord Hauser the homosexual confidante of Greta Garbo. Nevertheless, there is no record that he ever had sex with men.

Any repressed homosexual urges must remain pure speculation. At the impressionable age of 14 he would have read about Oscar Wilde's sentence to two years hard labour for his homosexual activities, which must have put a dampener on any budding homosexual enthusiasms for boys of Wodehouse's generation.

Nor was he much of a heterosexual. He had girlfriends in his youth but not many, and there is no evidence of sexual activity in any of these relationships.

He married Ethel Newton in 1914, having met her on a blind date. She had been married and widowed twice before she met Wodehouse. Her first husband had died of mysterious tropical illness and the second committed suicide after bankruptcy. She was Wodehouse's complete opposite in sexual matters, highly strung, extrovert and flirtatious. They remained together till separated by Wodehouse's death.

However, they never had children and may not have had much sex. They had separate bedrooms from the start of the marriage, and often lived apart. Even when they both stayed in the same hotel they typically took separate suites, often on different floors. One possible explanation is an attack of mumps orchitis in 1901 which may have rendered Wodehouse infertile and possibly impotent, although again this is speculation. No medical records have come to light.

Wodehouse's most recent biographer Robert McCrum suggests that Ethel took many lovers and tells the intriguing story of the US Army captain Bobby Denby who quite openly joined their household in 1921. McCrum suggests that Wodehouse may have tolerated a fairly open affair between Ethel and Bobby.

If this is true, I salute him. It shows Wodehouse at his best. Ethel was a good wife to him in all other ways and he was a good husband. If he, for whatever reason, did not need sex and Ethel and Bobby did, then why should he not turn a blind eye? Good for all three of them.

Jim Thornton 12 November 2005

[1] This mildly prurient private comment about a scandal concerning the English actor Henry Daniell and his wife, is almost unique.

"Apparently they go down to Los Angeles and either (a) indulge in or (b) witness orgies – probably both … there's something pleasantly domestic about a husband and wife sitting side by side with their eyes glued to peepholes, watching the baser elements whoop it up. And what I want to know is – where are these orgies? I feel I've been missing something."

- Aunts Aren't Gentlemen
- Carry On, Jeeves
- The Code of the Woosters
- The Inimitable Jeeves
- Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit
- Jeeves in the Offing
- Joy in the Morning
- The Mating Season
- My Man Jeeves
- Much Obliged, Jeeves
- Right Ho, Jeeves
- Ring for Jeeves
- Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves
- Thank You, Jeeves
- Very Good, Jeeves

Blandings Castle

- Blandings Castle and Elsewhere
- Heavy Weather
- Full Moon
- Galahad at Blandings
- Leave It to Psmith
- Lord Emsworth and Others
- A Pelican at Blandings
- Pigs Have Wings
- Service with a Smile
- Something Fresh
- Summer Lightning
- Sunset at Blandings
- Uncle Fred in the Springtime

Psmith

- Leave It to Psmith
- Mike
- Psmith in the City
- Psmith, Journalist

School stories

- The Gold Bat
- The Head of Kay's
- Mike
- The Pothunters
- A Prefect's Uncle
- Tales of St. Austin's
- The White Feather

Autobiographical

- Bring on the Girls!
- Performing Flea

Over Seventy

Other books
and stories

The Adventures of Sally
Bachelors Anonymous
Barmy in Wonderland
Big Money
Bill the Conqueror
The Clicking of Cuthbert
Cocktail Time
The Coming of Bill
Company for Henry
A Damsel in Distress
Do Butlers Burgle Banks?
Doctor Sally
Eggs, Beans and Crumpets
A Few Quick Ones
French Leave
Frozen Assets
A Gentleman of Leisure
The Girl in Blue
The Girl on the Boat
The Globe By the Way Book
The Heart of a Goof
Hot Water
Ice in the Bedroom
If I Were You
Indiscretions of Archie
Jill the Reckless
Laughing Gas
The Little Nugget
Louder and Funnier
Love Among the Chickens
The Luck of the Bodkins
The Luck Stone
The Man with Two Left Feet
The Man Upstairs
Meet Mr Mulliner
Money for Nothing
Money in the Bank
Mr Mulliner Speaking
Mulliner Nights
Not George Washington
Nothing Serious
The Old Reliable
Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin
Piccadilly Jim
Plum Pie
The Prince and Betty
Quick Service
Sam the Sudden
The Small Bachelor

Something Fishy
Spring Fever
Summer Moonshine
The Swoop!
Ukridge
Uncle Dynamite
Uneasy Money
William Tell Told Again
Young Men in Spats

Radio

What Ho, Jeeves
The Code of the Woosters

Stage

Sergeant Brue (1904)
The Beauty of Bath (1906)
My Darling (1907)
The Gay Gordons (1907)
Nuts and Wine (1914)
Miss Springtime (1916)
Have a Heart (1917)
Oh, Boy! (1917)
Leave It to Jane (1917)
Kitty Darlin' (1917)
The Riviera Girl (1917)
Miss 1917 (1917)
Oh, Lady! Lady!! (1918)
See You Later (1918)
The Girl Behind the Gun (1918)
The Canary (1918)
Oh, My Dear! (1918)
Kissing Time (1919)
The Rose of China (1919)
Sally (1920)
The Golden Moth (1921)
The Cabaret Girl (1922)
The Beauty Prize (1923)
Sitting Pretty (1924)
Hearts and Diamonds (1926)
Oh, Kay! (1926)
The Nightingale (1927)
Show Boat (1927)
Rosalie (1928)
The Three Musketeers (1928)
Anything Goes (1934)
Leave It to Psmith
Ring for Jeeves
Come On, Jeeves
Jeeves
By Jeeves

Films

- A Gentleman of Leisure (1915)
- A Damsel in Distress (1919)
- Piccadilly Jim (1919)
- Summer Lightning (1933)
- Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)
- Thank You, Jeeves! (1936)
- Step Lively, Jeeves (1937)
- Piccadilly Jim (1936)
- A Damsel in Distress (1937)
- The Girl on the Boat (1961)
- By Jeeves (2001)
- Piccadilly Jim (2006)

Television

- The World of Wooster (1965-67)
- The World of Wodehouse (1967-68)
- Wodehouse Playhouse (1975-78)
- Jeeves and Wooster (1990-93)
- Heavy Weather (1995)